THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) and (c) The Government is aware of the activities of touts who operate from outside the passport offices. The activities of touts have been brought to the attention of the local police from time to time and police action against them has been intensified. Investigations so far have not established any definite linkage between the touts and employees of the Passport Offices. However, vigilance has been strengthened at the Passport Offices and whenever any act of impropriety by any Passport official comes to the notice of the Government, appropriate action is taken against the earning official.

(d) The Government have taken several measures in the recent past to counter the illegal activities of touts and agents in the grant of passport services to the public. These include de-recognition of travel agents as an authorised channel for servicing passport applications, issue of passport application forms free of charge, augmentation in the number of passport offices and collection centres in the country, dispatch of passports directly to the addressees by post etc. Government is also making efforts to increase public awareness of the various facilities available at the Passport Offices so as to minimise the influence and activities of the touts.

Implementation of Crop Insurance Scheme at Block Level

†*70. SHRI RAMJI LAL: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the draft of the Crop Insurance Scheme together with the grounds on which this scheme has been implemented in various States;

(b) whether Government would implement Crop Insurance Scheme at the block level, particularly, for the small farmers; and

(c) if so, by when and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI NITISH KUMAR): (a) The National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (Rashtriya Krishi Bima Yojana) has been implemented from Rabi 1999-2000. The scheme covers all farmers (loanee and non-loanee), more crops, more risks and charges rationalised premium rates.

(b) and (c) The scheme provides for operation with the Gram Panchayat, as unit area, subject to the availability of past yield data. It is applicable to all farmers including the small and marginal farmers.

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†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.